Karbala, the Chain of Events



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Article

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Highlights of Karbala, History of Mu'awiyah and Yazid, events of 'Ashura, and lessons from Karbala.

Highlights of Karbala

The events of Karbala reflect the collision of the good versus the evil, the virtuous versus the wicked, and the collision of **Imam Husayn** (the head of virtue) versus **Yazid** (the head of impiety). Al-Husayn was a revolutionary person, a righteous man, the religious authority, the Imam of Muslim Ummah.

As the representative of his grandfather Prophet Muhammad (S), Imam Husayn's main concern was to safeguard and protect Islam and guide fellow Muslims. On the other hand, the staying power of the rulers (Mu'awiya and his son Yazid) depended solely on the might of the sword. They used brute force to rule over the Muslim empire even by all possible illicit means.

Imam Husayn as head of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) never recognized Mu'awiya nor his followers. Before him **Imam 'Ali (a.s.)** had fought battles against Mu'awiya because Mu'awiya continuously violated the Islamic principles. **Imam Al-Hasan (a.s.)** had to swallow the bitter pill of making a peace agreement with Mu'awiya, in order to safeguard the security of the Ummah which was at stake.

When Yazid son of Mu'awiya declared himself as a ruler over the Ummah, he demanded **Imam Al-Husayn's (a.s.)** allegiance of loyalty. Imam Husayn on his part flatly rejected Yazid's rule and behavior, for there was no way Yazid could represent Islam, it would be blasphemy. But Yazid, the tyrant ruler over the Ummah, was adamant in his demand, and tension between the two parties increased day by day.

Imam Husayn was quick to realize that giving allegiance of loyalty to Yazid would serve no purpose but to jeopardize the survival of Islam. To safeguard and protect Islam, therefore, the Imam had no choice but to confront and collide with Yazid's rulership irrespective of consequences. Since Yazid had ordered his commanders to seize the Imam's allegiance of loyalty at any cost, even by brutal force, the commanders had to assemble a relatively large army, surrounding Imam Husayn's camp in a desert called **Karbala**.

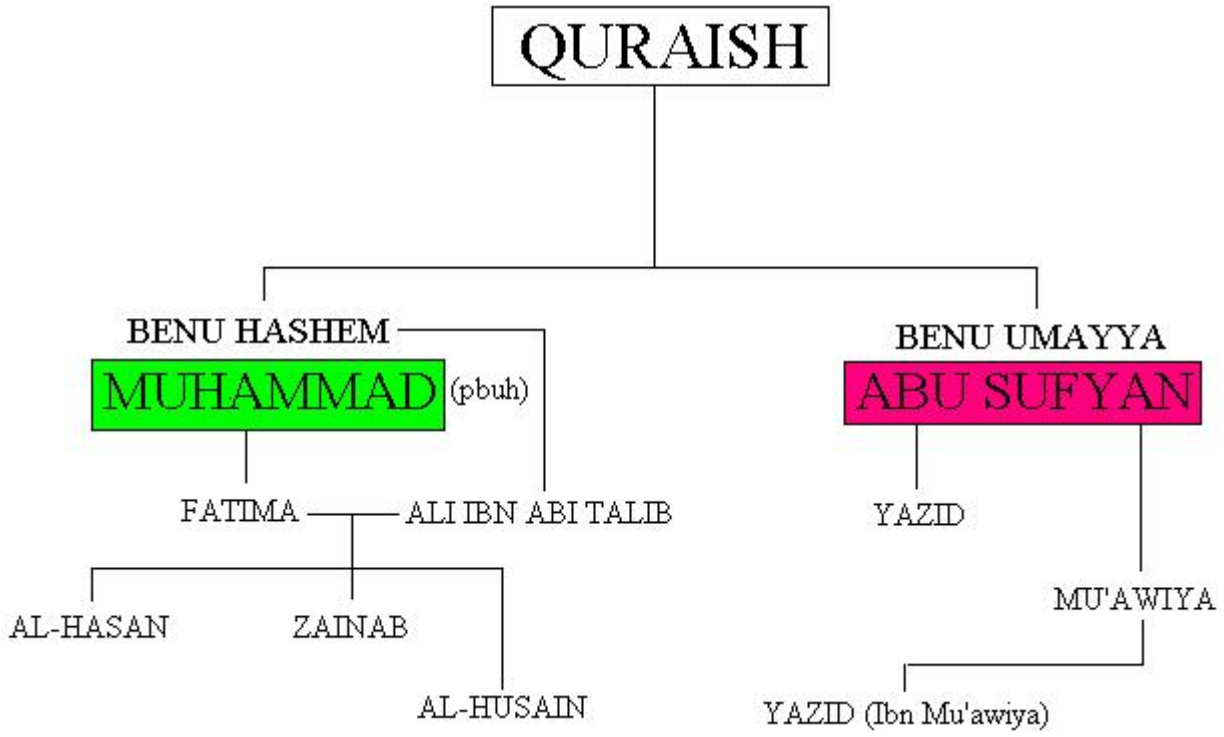
Then they cut off the basic necessities to the camp, including access to water. The camp consisted of Imam Husayn, his family, friends, and companions, all of whom stood fast and firmly with him. These braves would rather face death for the noble cause of Islam, than submit to the outrageous tyranny and the un-Islamic ways of Yazid.

Thus, Karbala proved to be a clash involving Islamic truths versus falsehood, right versus wrong, belief

versus disbelief, and the oppressed versus the oppressor, faith against brute force. Karbala was about standing in the face of oppression, regardless no matter the cost. Thus, in Karbala, Al–Husayn the 57 year old grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S), sacrificed his totality and all he had, for one goal.

This goal was **to let the truth triumph over falsehood** eventually, and he did that brilliantly.

His goal was to foil the plan that Mu'awiya had expertly developed for his son, Yazid, which was to establish a permanent Bani Umayya rulership over the Muslim Ummah (even by sacrificing the Islamic principles), but doing it in the name of Islam. Brilliantly, Imam Husayn succeeded in foiling this plan and he exposed the disreputable nature of Bani Umayya though this was at the expense of his life.



Who Was Mu'awiya?

Mu'awiya was son of *Abu Sufyan*, a leader of *Bani Umayya clan* which was one of the clans of Quraish tribes. Mu'awiya grew up in a family known to be cunning, worldly, materialistic, and power hungry. Mu'awiya became Muslim only when Prophet Muhammad (S) triumphed over Mecca. Those who became Muslim in this manner were called **Tulaqaa',** (a term scornfully used for the disbelievers who became Muslims to save their lives).

Mu'awiya, his father Abu Sufyan, his mother Hind, and his brother Yazid son of Abu Sufyan were all Tulaqaa'; Mu'awiya never forgot this stigma for the rest of his life; he could never shake it from his mind, thus a feeling of malicious vengeance always existed in his heart. Mu'awiya's character and aspirations were entirely opposite to that of his sister, *Umm Habiba,* who was one of the wives of the Holy Prophet (S). Unlike Mu'awiya, Umm Habiba was a sincere believer and a pious person.

Omar, the second Khalifa, appointed Mu'awiya's brother, **Yazid son of Abu Sufyan,** as the Governor of

Syria when the Muslims captured that territory from the Byzantines. Within a few years, Yazid son of Abu Sufyan died of a disease, and Omar appointed Mu'awiya in his brother's place as the Governor. Upon coming to power, Mu'awiya took advantage of the rich public treasury of Syria using it personally to buy favors and influence people.

Thus he built a large base of support among some tribes, almost to the fanatic level. He used this to his advantage in later years to form a network of informants (spies) against **Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)** and their devotees.

Jamal Confrontation

When *Imam 'Ali* (*a.s.*) became Khalifa, he decided to remove Mu'awiya immediately, notwithstanding Mu'awiya's strong base of support. At that time, Mu'awiya had been the governor of Syria, Palestine, and Jordan for 17 years. Mu'awiya became defiant, he refused to obey 'Ali's orders. Brazen and unabashed, he even declined to recognize 'Ali or give allegiance of loyalty to him.

Also in defiance, Mu'awiya established a parallel government in Greater Syria, and started a campaign of treacherous accusations and malicious rumors against Imam 'Ali (a.s.). He falsely blamed Imam 'Ali for the killing of Uthman, the third Khalifa, and urged people to take up arms against the Imam. He spread these notorious accusations constantly to incite an uprising against 'Ali (a.s.).

At the same time *A'isha*, the Prophet's widow, became highly vocal against Imam 'Ali (a.s.). She called for taking revenge for the blood of Uthman. As a result, a party of 3,000 insurgents supported by Sahaaba (Companions) such as *Talha* and *Zubair*, along with A'isha headed toward Basrah. The insurgents upon reaching Basrah clashed with the local authorities and finally occupied a portion of Basrah. Soon after the occupation these insurgents spread a reign of terror among the people, killing no less than 600 local Muslims, pilfering the treasury and stealing the arms supplies of the armory.

As a Khalifa in charge, Imam 'Ali (a.s.) could not ignore the situation, he had to act and restore peace and order. He ordered his forces to proceed to Basrah. As the Imam's forces reached near Basrah, Imam 'Ali (a.s.) tried to persuade the insurgents led by A'isha, Zubair and Talha to change their minds and avoid confrontation, but he did not succeed. A battle broke out though Zubair elected not to fight; Talha was wounded then bled to death.

Thousands of people lost their lives. A'isha fell down from the camel after it was disabled; but luckily she was not hurt. Imam 'Ali asked *Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr,* (A'isha's brother), to take A'isha to Basrah for a few days, and from there to escort her to Medina with full honor and dignity. Upon leaving Basrah Al–Hasan (a.s.) and Al–Husayn (a.s.) accompanied the Prophet's widow for some distance before bidding her farewell.

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) stayed in Basrah for a few weeks to restore law and order. He compensated for the

dead, and decided to forgive and absolve all who fought against him, exactly as the Prophet (S) had done when he triumphed over Mecca 40 years earlier.

Battle of Siffin

Upon returning to Kufa, Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) immediately prepared for the anticipated clash with Mu'awiya. The defying Mu'awiya continued to violate the Islamic principles by personally using the public treasury for espionage and buying peoples' loyalty. The people of Syria fully believed him and the in false picture he presented. Ultimately this resulted in a confrontation called *Battle of Siffin* when the troops of the two sides met at **Siffin**.

The battle saw ferocious fighting for nine days when Mu'awiya's forces were near collapse. His troops were fleeing and in disarray, and their retreat was in massive disorder, running helter skelter. Mu'awiya was alarmed, tense and frightened, preparing to run away, when he learned of a clever trick. The trick was indecent and unbecoming, it was to make the Holy Quran as an instrument and exploit it, to use it as a tool to his advantage.

Mu'awiya seized on this immediately and commanded his fighters to raise 500 Holy Qurans on tips of spears, in order to stun the troops of Imam ‘Ali. As jolting as it was, this maneuver did break the onslaught and the momentum of ‘Ali's fighters, for they were very pious men. But Imam ‘Ali was quick to recognize this deceit, he knew how deceptive Mu'awiya was, and now that being near collapse, Mu'awiya wanted to save his neck at the expense of the Quran itself.

With that in mind, ‘Ali (a.s.) urged his generals not to halt, but to keep fighting since victory was almost at hand. Alas, ‘Ali's generals and fighters were in shock, for the sight of the Holy Quran high on spear heads was startling to say the least. They could not take it. Not willing to fight, they wanted to accept Mu'awiya's offer to halt the fighting and negotiate instead. The termination of the battle in this manner and the consequences thereof proved to be disastrous to say the least, especially for Ahlul Bayt and Islam.

It is said that there was a conspiracy between **Amr Ibnil Aas** of Mu'awiya's side, and **Ash'ath Ibn Qais**, a General in Imam ‘Ali's camp, who was working as a spy against ‘Ali, secretly working as an agent for Mu'awiya. In this battle 45,000 men lost their lives in Mu'awiya's camp, and about 25,000 in ‘Ali's (a.s.) camp.

Many men of high caliber from both sides died, especially *Ammar Ibn Yasir,* the great Companion of the Prophet (S), who was 90 years old and fought on Imam ‘Ali's side against Mu'awiya.

After Siffin

Imam ‘Ali's (a.s.) generals, who stopped the battle to negotiate with Mu'awiya, did not pick the right

person for the negotiation. They unyieldingly refused to accept Imam ‘Ali's choice, instead they picked Kufa's Governor, **Abu-Musa Ash'ari**, an incompetent Governor who had been previously dismissed from office by Imam ‘Ali. Mu'awiya appointed **Amr Ibnil Aas**, a shrewd and cunning man, to be his representative in the negotiation. Negotiation between the two sides did not take place for about one year.

When the two negotiators came face to face, it was clear that Ash'ari's capability was no match for his opponent Ibnil Aas. In the negotiations, Ash'ari proposed that, both Mu'awiya and Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) were to abdicate and to let the people hold election for the Khilaafah. Amr Ibnil Aas, a deceptive man at best, quickly agreed to Ash'ari's proposal and asked Ash'ari to first announce the agreement.

Ash'ari stood up and announced, "O people, we have agreed not to consider ‘Ali or Mu'awiya for Khilaafah. You may choose or elect whomever you think is fit." The cunning Amr Ibnil Aas stood up next to say, "O people! I won't consider ‘Ali for the Khilaafah. But Mu'awiya, in my opinion, is the person for that office!"

Upon hearing this (and feeling deceived), the people screamed disapprovingly, an uproar was the result. Imam ‘Ali's (a.s.) camp was in shock, they were double-crossed, deceived and lied to, they felt deeply cut. Amr's double crossing and deception was simply beyond their imagination. They left the place bewildered and utterly disappointed. Because of this a large group of Imam ‘Ali's supporters defected to form a separate group called **Kharijies**, meaning the Outsiders.

The Khariji became fanatically opposed to Imam ‘Ali and Mu'awiya. Some of their members met secretly in Mecca and drew a plan to assassinate ‘Ali (a.s.) in Kufa, Mu'awiya in Syria, and Amr Ibnil Aas in Egypt. Three fanatics took the responsibility, they were to attack their victims in the morning, the same day, as the would-be victims were going to the mosque to lead the morning salat.

Ibn Muljim attacked and fatally wounded Imam ‘Ali (a.s.), whereas Mu'awiya escaped with a light wound of his buttock. Amr Ibnil Aas was ill that day and his replacement was killed by the Khariji. Imam ‘Ali (a.s.), in wounded condition, conferred the Imamah and the reign of the Islamic nation to his 37 years old son **Al-Hasan**.

Peace Agreement Between Imam Al-Hasan And Mu'awiya

Imam Hasan (a.s.) faced extremely difficult conditions from the start. He observed that fear, anxiety and much distress were ever present in Kufa, Basrah, Medina and other towns. The anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity were caused by Mu'awiya's ill dealing of sincere Muslims. Mu'awiya had spread secret agents all over to defame Ahlul Bayt.

Imam Hasan knew that his father Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) had stood like a lion in all difficulties and fought battles against Mu'awiya, but these confrontations had resulted in heavy casualties on both sides.

A mass scale family devastation was visible everywhere. Considering all circumstances, Imam Hasan (a.s.) discussed the matter with his brother Husayn (a.s.) and other relatives. He revealed to them that in order to end the bloodshed and to provide a reasonable safety and security to the Ummah, he would make a peace agreement with Mu'awiya and abdicate until after Mu'awiya's death. After a few days of careful consideration, Imam Hasan (a.s.) accepted an agreement as per the terms dictated by the Imam and agreed to by Mu'awiya. Four noteworthy terms of this agreement were:

– People of Syria, Iraq, Hijaz, Yemen and other places shall enjoy amnesty against persecution,

– Friends and companions of Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) and all their women and children shall be protected from all dangers,

– Mu'awiya is to immediately stop the use of abusive language with reference to Ahlul Bayt (cursing Imam ‘Ali) after Salat of Jumu'a), and

– Mu'awiya shall not appoint anyone as his successor.

Once the treaty was signed, Imam Hasan (a.s.) and brother Husayn (a.s.) moved out of Kufa and settled in Medina. Over there both Imams lost no time in holding nightly meetings for Islamic discussions. The nightly meetings proved very successful and gained tremendous popularity. More people started to attend, to hear the Imams give of their fountain of knowledge on Islam and humanity.

The reputation of these meetings began to fly to faraway places. People from as far away as Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and other distant areas travelled to Medina to learn about the Islamic values. As years passed, the knowledge thus given started to bear fruits. The number of Islamic scholars multiplied and increased considerably.

In the meantime Mu'awiya, unabashedly elected to disregard the terms of his treaty with Imam Al–Hasan.

a) He sent secret agents to terrorize, kidnap, or even kill innocent people specially those who were loyal to Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

b) Instead of helping the needy with the public treasury, Mu'awiya's governors and their surrogates used the public treasury for personal use, freely and excessively as they wished.

c) Freedom suddenly died, and dictatorship took its place.

d) Mu'awiya gathered a very large number of collaborators who unabashedly would do anything for money.

Mu'awiya's Plot to Poison Imam Hasan (a.s.)

It was Mu'awiya's ardent desire to impose his son *Yazid* (who had been named after his uncle) upon the Muslims by making him the succeeding Khalifa, despite the fact that Yazid was the playboy of the time, with many evil habits including gambling, heavy drinking, and indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh.

But the peace agreement would not permit Mu'awiya to appoint Yazid as his successor, (According to the agreement Imam Hasan would immediately become Khalifa upon Mu'awiya's death). **Therefore, it was obvious to Mu'awiya that, if Al-Hasan did not outlive him, Mu'awiya could do as he pleased.** Thus Mu'awiya planned to kill Imam Al-Hasan in order to pave the way for his son Yazid to be his successor.

Mu'awiya sent one of his agents to contact Imam Al-Hasan's wife *Joda* who was the daughter of Al-Ash'ath (once a secret agent for Mu'awiya against Imam 'Ali in the Battle of Siffin). Joda was asked a small favor, i.e., to put a little poison in Al-Hasan's food, and in return Mu'awiya would give her a large sum of money and also make her wife of his son Yazid. She found the offer too attractive to ignore, and foolishly agreed to accept it. A few days later, she mixed poison in honey and gave it to the Imam.

As soon as the Imam took the poisoned honey he became seriously ill. Sensing that his death was imminent, the Imam designated his brother Al-Husayn (a.s.) to be the third Imam. Although Imam Al-Hasan knew he was poisoned, he did not reveal that to anyone but to his brother Al-Husayn.

One thing Al-Hasan had wished was to have his burial by the side of his grandfather, Prophet Muhammad (S). Imam Husayn made all the arrangements to fulfill that wish but Mu'awiya's governor over Medina did not let that happen and used military force to stop it. Imam Al-Hasan was 47 year old when he died of poisoning.

Medina was never the same without Imam Hasan (a.s.). Everyone missed him dearly. People at first did not believe Mu'awiya poisoned Imam Al-Hasan, but soon found out the truth.

When Husayn (a.s.) was designated as the 3rd Imam he was 46 years old. Imam Husayn (a.s.) carried on with his mission of teaching Islam as before. A large number of people kept coming to see him and to learn from him. This process continued for several years when people began to hear an ugly rumor that Mu'awiya wanted his son, Yazid, to succeed him.

Mu'awiya Designates Yazid as Successor

Mu'awiya began a campaign to introduce Monarchy into the structure of Islam. To have Monarchy, by force or otherwise is alien to Islam, an innovation in religion, simply not acceptable. Everyone knew that, for Islam does not subscribe to any form of Royalty through inheritance or Monarchy. In Islam it is supposed to be Shura.

Nevertheless, Mu'awiya sent his agents to the prominent members of the communities to obtain allegiance of loyalty to his son Yazid. But Yazid was evil, of the drinking type, incompetent, contemptible, and a pleasure-seeking person. People knew that. So the people protested vigorously. There was anger everywhere.

Emotions went sky high. To calm people down, at least temporarily, Mu'awiya decided to send his son Yazid to Mecca for the pilgrimage. Yes, Yazid did go to Mecca but only after taking alcohol with him as well as a chorus of girls for his entertainment.

Mu'awiya Dies

Mu'awiya was getting older day by day. At the age of 75, he became seriously ill. He was nearing death. He lay weak and lifeless as if something was choking and strangling him. He felt tortured and tormented, and continuously cried for mercy. He was in terrible pain. He wanted to die but death would not come close to him.

His conscience tormented him for the calamities that he brought upon the Islamic Ummah specially Ahlul Bayt. Mu'awiya suffered in agony for many many days. His suffering continued until he breathed his last. At the time of his death, the 30 year old Yazid was nowhere near him, he had gone for fun on a hunting trip.

(Please note that Mu'awiya's brother was by the name of Yazid, and he had named his son after his brother.)

Yazid Becomes Ruler

Upon Mu'awiya's death, Yazid, 30 years old, managed to impose himself on the people and become the Khalifa. At first people refused to accept him as a representative of the Prophet (S) and Islamic Ummah, but Yazid approached people in mosques for their favors. Like his father Mu'awiya, Yazid used all possible means like bribery, coercion, pressure, threats, and force to receive the people's acceptance of him as the legitimate ruler.

Many people were worried, threats to their lives and livelihood was too menacing, so they grudgingly and reluctantly gave in. But, Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his family (who practiced Islam in its true sense), did not give in. As the true representative of Prophet Muhammad (S), Al-Husayn flatly refused accepting Yazid either as a Khalifa or a leader of Islam. Despite Yazid's intimidating military power the Imam stood firm in his resolve and chose to challenge Bani Umayya's authorities.

Yazid commissioned *Waleed Ibn Ut'ba,* his Governor over Medina, to ask for Imam Husayn's allegiance of loyalty *or else upon refusal, his head.* Waleed invited Al-Husayn to a meeting for the purpose. Imam Husayn did not give his word at the meeting and decided to leave Medina along with his family to

proceed to Mecca. When Al-Husayn reached Mecca he received 12,000 letters from Kufa urging him to go to Kufa to be their leader, and be the Khalifa. Imam sent an emissary, his cousin **Muslim Ibn Aqeel,** to Kufa to ascertain first-hand information about the situation in Iraq.

In the meantime Yazid spread a network of informants and secret agents in Mecca to assassinate the Imam during pilgrimage. Imam learned about the spies, and carefully evaluated the situation in Mecca. Imam Husayn knew that Yazid son of Mu'awiya had no regard for Islamic values and teachings, that he would do anything to enforce his tyrannical rule.

Imam Husayn also knew that giving allegiance of loyalty to an imposter like Yazid would certainly place Islam at great jeopardy. Therefore he decided to leave Mecca for Kufa to prepare for a confrontation with Yazid and his forces.

Many friends and relatives urged Imam Husayn not to go to Kufa, but he insisted on going. Imam Husayn, along with family, friends, and companions began the journey toward Kufa (1,100 miles) in a long caravan in the blistering heat of summer.

On the Way to Karbala

During the early phase of the journey the caravan met **Al-Farazdaq** (a famous poet) at a place called al-Sifah. Al-Farazdaq advised the Imam not to go to Kufa because though people's hearts were with him (Imam), their swords would be against him. But the Imam continued with the journey, and he received the first letter from his emissary Muslim Ibn Aqeel with good news.

The letter indicated that the people were more than ready to welcome the Imam in Kufa and were looking forward to his leadership. Imam Husayn decided to send another emissary to Kufa with a message. The caravan kept proceeding toward Kufa. Many days passed but the Imam did not receive any more responses from Muslim Ibn Aqeel.

In Kufa Muslim Bin Aqeel with the help of **Mukhtar Al-Thaqafi** and **Hani Ibn Urwah** continued to hold secret meetings with the supporters of the Imam. Within a short time the gatherings started to gain momentum. Yazid through his spies and informants learned about Muslim's successes in Kufa. He appointed the tyrant **Ubaidullah Ibn Ziyad** to replace *al-Nu'man Ibn al-Basheer* as Governor of Kufa.

Meanwhile, as Al-Husayn's caravan got closer to its destination (Kufa), coming to a place called Zubalah, Imam Husayn unexpectedly received shocking news. The shocking news was about Muslim Ibn Aqeel and the person who provided him shelter, Hani's Ibn Urwah, both of whom were arrested and beheaded by the Governor Ibn Ziyad. Mukhtar was also arrested and imprisoned and tortured by Ibn Ziyad.

Imam Husayn gathered his companions and disclosed to them about the bad news, and said, "Our Shi'a have deserted us, those of you who prefer to leave us may do so freely and without guilt." Becoming

scared, some companions left the caravan. Imam Husayn continued with the journey along with close companions and family members until he was face to face with 1,000 horsemen led by *Hurr al-Riyahi* representing the enemy.

The enemy army blocked the camps of Imam Husayn (a.s.) from advancing. Tension started to rise between the two. The Imam addressed the enemy explaining to them his motives for going to Kufa, that it was in response to the invitation of the people. He even showed them a bagful of letters he received from Kufa. Hurr said that he and his men were not the writers of those letters. Imam told them that if they did not like him to advance with the journey, he was prepared to return to Hijaz.

Hurr replied, "We are commissioned to follow you until we take you to Governor Ibn Ziyad, and suggested to the Imam to go towards a station which is neither Kufa nor Medina." Imam Husayn found the proposal fair and turned the caravan away from Kufa. Hurr and his army marched parallel to the Imam. The two sides reached a village called Nainawa where Ibn Ziyad's messenger (Yazid's governor over Kufa) delivered a message to Hurr.

The message read, " ...force Husayn to a halt. But let him stop in an open space, without vegetation or water." Hurr conveyed the contents of the letter to Imam Husayn.

The Imam, his family and companions defiantly resumed their journey and reached a place where another enemy force blocked their move and forced them to stop. When Imam Husayn learned that the place was called **Karbala**, he felt he reached the destination and ordered his camp to be setup. That day was 2nd of Muharram, Hijri 61.

Karbala

Upon learning that his army had succeeded to lay a siege around the Imam's camp, Governor Ibn Ziyad sent additional military units to Karbala and appointed *Umar Ibn Sa'ad* in charge. Imam Husayn (a.s.) opened a dialogue with Umar Ibn Sa'ad and convinced him to lift the siege so that the Imam with his family and companions could leave Iraq.

Umar Ibn Sa'ad liked the Imam's proposal and sent a message to Governor Ibn Ziyad notifying him about the results of the talks with Imam Husayn (a.s.). Ibn Ziyad also found the Imam's proposal acceptable. However before agreeing to it officially, *Shimr Bin Dhil-Jawshan,* opposed it strongly. As a result Ziyad wrote a letter to Umar Ibn Sa'ad commanding him to either go to war with Imam Husayn (a.s.) or be relieved of his duties as commander of the army and Shimr would not only replace him but despatch Ibn Sa'ad's head to Kufa.

Umar Ibn bin Sa'ad got the letter. After pondering over the consequences he decided to fight Imam Husayn (a.s.). On the 7th day of Muharram he moved his troops closer to the camp and began to surround the Husaini camp. Ibn Sa'ad laid a blockade around the camp to cut it off from access to the

river Euphrates, to deprive it of water in a move to force them to surrender.

Two days later, (on the 9th of Muharram), the enemy's military forces closed in on the camp of Imam Husayn (a.s.). Imam asked his brother, Abbas, to talk to Ibn Sa'ad and request a delay of the aggression by one night. Umar Ibn Sa'ad agreed to the demand. He ordered his troops to delay the aggression till next morning.

Imam Husayn and his pious companions spent that night in prayers. During the night the Imam told the companions, " the enemy is interested in none but me, me alone. I'll be most delighted to permit each and every one of you to go back, and I urge you to do so...." All companions screamed in response, "By Allah, never, never! We will either live with you or die together with you."

Ashuraa

Finally, the day of Ashuraa dawned upon the soil of Karbala. It was the day when Jihad would be in full bloom, blood would be shed, 72 innocent lives would be sacrificed, and a decisive battle would be won to save Islam and the Ummah.

It had been a few days since the water supply was cut off by the enemy. Children were crying for water, the women were desperate for water, Zainul-Abideen, the son of Imam Husayn (a.s.) was sick with fever. The suffering from the thirst was too painful to bear. And despite this, not a single person in the camp made any complaints or even questioned the mission of Imam Husayn. Each member supported the Imam wholeheartedly and enthusiastically.

Next morning Imam Husayn (a.s.) went out of the camp and saw Umar Ibn Sa'ad mobilizing his troops to start the hostility. He stared at the intimidating army, and as large as it was Imam Husayn showed no signs of compromise. Imam Husayn raised his hands in prayer:

"O Allah! It is Thee in whom I trust amid all grief. You are my hope amid all violence. Thou are my refuge and provision in everything that happens to me. How many grievances weaken the heart, leaving me with no means to handle them, during which friend deserts me, and enemy rejoices in it. I lay it before Thee and complain of it to Thee, because of my desire in Thee, Thee alone. You relieve me of it and remove it from me. Thou are the Master of all Grace, the Essence of Goodness, and the Ultimate Resort of all Desire."

Before the actual engagement was to take place, Hurr, the previous commander of the enemy force, felt his conscience violently stirring, he was in turmoil. Upon realizing the gravity of the situation, he suddenly broke away from Umar Ibn Sa'ad's camp (along with two others). They rushed toward Imam Husayn (a.s.) to join his camp.

Hurr's heart was jumping with joy, his mind relieved of an agonizing tension. Hurr's defection worried Umar Ibn Sa'ad very much, lest others do the same and defect. So Umar Ibn Sa'ad threw an arrow in the

air to indicate the start of the battle. This was the outset of a catastrophe and a tragic event that Mu'awiya had once conceived to happen.

The Battle

Imam Husayn's supporters insisted on being the first to fight. Therefore, they took the brunt of the enemy attack. The battle was ferocious. Within a short time the Imam's supporters slay a large number of the enemy fighters; they were on the offensive and the enemy on the defensive. This caused apprehension and confusion in the enemy military, the 72 of Husayn's against the 5,000 of the enemy (some say 30,000) being on the defensive.

So worried and nervous, the enemy commander-in-chief ordered his army not only to set fire to the Imam's tents (which were occupied mostly by frightened females and children), but at the same time reinforced his fighters with more troops.

The heroes began to fall, they were men of valor welcoming martyrdom, and they fell one after another, for the enemy was overwhelming in number. By noon time the Imam stopped the fight to perform the Salat (prayer). By this time those left were mainly his family and a few supporters. They performed the Salat together. Two supporters were guarding the performers of Salat. The enemy was standing still, watching!! When Salat was finished one of the guards fell dead; there were 17 arrows in his back.

'Ali Akbar, Husayn's son obtained permission to fight and dashed toward the enemy. He engaged them in fierce fighting, falling on them like thunder, slaying numerous fighters. He continued to move forward, deep inside the enemy. The enemy was overpowering in number, it overwhelmed him cutting him with swords and spears, and his body became nothing but wounds gushing blood, until he died.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) rushed to the area and picked up the wounded limp body and brought it to the appalled camp. His sister and others in the camp were horrified and shocked at the scene.

Abbas and five other brothers of Imam Husayn went to fight. They also engaged the enemy in a fierce fighting, almost doing the impossible. Abbas went toward the river to bring some water for the thirsty children. While he was returning on his horse with the water, he was attacked by a large horde of the enemy, overwhelming and severely wounding him. As much as he tried Abbas could not save the water, he fell from his horse to breath his last.

Next to the battle field went the sons of Imam Al-Hasan and Zainab and their cousins (about 17 of them). They were all in their teens but each stood bravely, believing in the mission, facing a formidable enemy, and showed no less enthusiasm in their quest to embrace the martyrdom.

Al-Husayn and His Baby

By the afternoon 70 brave persons had sacrificed their lives in Karbala to save Islam. All had fought under nerve racking conditions, severe thirst, dehydration, exhaustion, and agonizing feeling of what would happen to the family of the Prophet (S) afterwards. Husayn endured all that and more, for he saw all his beloved ones brutally cut to pieces, including children. Remaining the only one, Imam Husayn was to face the enemy head on.

Precisely at that moment Imam Husayn heard his baby crying incessantly, agonizing because of the thirst. Imam Husayn's love for his family was unbound, especially for a suffering baby. He held the six months old baby, his youngest son (‘Ali Asghar) in his arms, and appealed to the enemy fighters for some water for the baby.

Imam wanted to awaken their conscience and stir their human feelings but the stone-hearted enemy, instead of giving water, zoomed an arrow toward the agonizing baby and killed him instantly. Imam Husayn was shocked. He felt an unbearable wave of pain. The sight of the limp baby in his arms was agonizingly painful. He filled his palm with the blood of the baby, and threw it upwards toward the sky, complaining to Allah (swt),

"O' Allah, O' my Lord! My consolation is the fact that Thou in Thine Majesty are witnessing what I am going through."

Al-Husayn by Himself

Imam Husayn (a.s.) was alone, one man against thousands. He took them on, fighting them bravely, and kept fighting, receiving many wounds in the process. Thousands of enemy fighters were surrounding him but none dared to move toward him.

The silence was broken when Shimr screamed for an attack, and then screamed again, threatening, and in response they attacked collectively, and one sword fell on Imam Husayn's left wrist and deeply cut his left hand. The blood gushed like a fountain.

Another sword was soon to follow and it hit his upper back. Imam Husayn (a.s.) felt numb as he fell to the ground, bleeding profusely. He was near the point of shock, even though staggering he tried to stand by leaning on his sword. Then he received the fatal blow.

It was at this point, that Shimr whose mother was a disbeliever, came forward and severed Imam Husayn's noble head from the body, the noble head kissed often by the Prophet (S)! Shimr and others had the audacity to carry it on the tip of a spear to Yazid, 600 miles away!

Umar Ibn Sa'ad ordered the horsemen to trample upon the supine bodies of Imam Husayn and all others killed, to disfigure them even further, as if the wounds, the bloodied bodies, and the headless forms were

not enough.

For three days the exposed bodies of the martyrs were left lying in the desert of Karbala. Afterwards, the people of the tribe of Bani–Asad, who were not far away from the battle field, helped bury them.

Umar Ibn Sa'ad and his forces (representing Bani Umayya) took the women and children as prisoners in shackles, put them on camels, and proceeded in a caravan from Karbala to Kufa. At the forefront of the procession were the heads of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his followers on the tip of spears. The scene was both grotesque and pathetic. This was the leftover of the beloved family of Prophet Muhammad (S), in such a deplorable unimaginable condition, all caused by people who called themselves Muslims!

Lessons from the Tragedy of Karbala

Karbala is the cruelest tragedy humanity has ever seen. Yet, the startling (though appalling) events in Karbala proved like a powerful volcano that shook the very foundation of Muslims, it stirred their consciousness, ignorant or learned alike. For sincere Muslims, Karbala turned into a triumph. The tragic event became the very beacon of light to always remind Muslims to practice Islam honestly and sincerely, to do what is right irrespective of consequences, and fear no one except Allah (swt).

On the other hand, Yazid never achieved what he and his father had planned to achieve, for within three years, Allah's wrath fell upon him, causing him to die at the age of 33 years. And within a few decades the rule of Bani Umayya crumbled and came to an end.

The tragedy of Karbala taught humanity a lesson that standing for the truth and fighting unto death for it is more honorable and valuable than submitting to the wrongful, especially when the survival of Islam is at stake.



Distance between Medina and Karbala about 1,100 miles.

Distance between Ibn Ziyad in Kufa and Yazid in Damascus about 750 miles.

Average travel by camel per day: 30–45 miles.

Sources

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Glossary

A'isha: Widow of the Prophet (S) and a leader during Jamal Confrontation.

Abbas: Brother of Imam Husayn, flag–bearer during Karbala.

Abu Sufyan: Leader of Bani Umayya, Mu'awiya's father, was inveterate enemy of Islam.

Abu Musa Ash'ari: Governor fired by Imam ‘Ali, was selected to arbitrate after Siffin.

Ahlul Bayt: The household of the Prophet (s), consisting of ‘Ali, Fatima, al–Hasan, al–Husayn and the 9 Imams descending from al–Husayn (peace be upon them all).

Al– Farazdaq: A famous poet.

Al– Nu'man Ibn al–Basheer: Governor over Kufa replaced by Ibn Ziyad through Yazid's order.

‘Ali Akbar: Son of Imam Al–Husayn, martyred in Karbala.

‘Ali Asghar: Baby of Imam Al–Husayn, martyred in Karbala.

Ammar Ibn Yasir: A famous highly revered Companion, on ‘Ali's side, killed in Siffin.

Amr Ibnil Aas: A cunning deceptive person, in Mu'awiya's camp, arbitrator after Siffin.

Ash'ath Ibn Qais: A spy General in ‘Ali's armed forces, also the father of Joda (wife of Al–Hasan).

Bani Asad: The tribe that buried Al–Husayn and the other martyrs of Karbala.

Bani Umayya: A clan known to be power hungry, greedy, and materialistic, of Mu'awiya.

Basrah: An important town in south of Iraq.

Byzantines: The Christian superpower ruling over Syria and Egypt that lost to Islam.

Hani Ibn Urwah: The man who helped Muslim Ibn Aqeel in Kufa and lost his life for the cause.

Hurr Ibn Yazid alRiyahi: The Commander of the enemy force who defected to the side of Imam Husayn.

Ibn Muljim: The killer of Imam ‘Ali while ‘Ali was performing Salat Al-Subh.

Ibn Ziyad: The Governor over Kufa responsible for the atrocities of Karbala.

Imam: The 12 Divinely Commissioned leaders of the Ummah after the Prophet (S).

Imam AlHasan (a.s.): The second Divinely Commissioned Imam, and the brother of Imam Husayn.

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.): The first Divinely Commissioned Imam, and the father of Imam Hasan and Husayn.

Imam Husayn (a.s.): The third Divinely Commissioned Imam, hero of Karbala, brother of Imam Hasan.

Iraq: Country in which Imam Husayn suffered at the hands of its military.

Jamal: Battle imposed on ‘Ali by A'isha, Talha, and Zubair.

Joda: Wife of Imam Al-Hasan, who poisoned him when enticed by Mu'awiya.

Karbala: The site of the ugliest atrocities committed against Al-Husayn, his family and devotees, but Karbala saved Islam from disintegration in an indirect way.

Khalifa: Head of state after the Prophet (S).

Kharijies: The outsiders who turned against ‘Ali, then killed him while he was praying.

Medina: Famous town of the Prophet (S) in Arabia.

Mu'awiya: Of Bani Umayya clan, brother of Yazid, also father of the infamous Yazid of Karbala.

Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr: Brother of A'isha who fought on ‘Ali's side during Battle of Jamal.

Mukhtar AlThaqafi: Loyalist of Ahlul Bayt.

Muslim Ibn Aqeel: Cousin of Al-Husayn and his emissary to Kufa, killed by Ibn Ziyad.

Omar: The second Khalifa who appointed Mu'awiya as the Governor over Syria.

Quraish: The clan of the Prophet (S).

Shimr Bin DhilJawshan: The killer of Imam Husayn, his name will remain in infamy.

Siffin: Battle imposed on ‘Ali by Mu'awiya.

Syria: Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine nowadays used to be called Syria.

Talha: Sahaabi, leader during Jamal Confrontation, killed during that battle.

Tulaqaa': Denigrating term used by Muhammad (S) for the disbelievers who had to become Muslims after Mecca was triumphed over.

Umar Ibn Sa'ad: Commander-in-chief of the military forces against Imam Husayn in Karbala.

Umm Habiba: Sister of Mu'awiya, daughter of Abu Sufyan, wife of the Prophet (S).

Uthman: The third Khalifa killed by the protesting Muslims.

Waleed Ibn Ut'ba: Governor over Medina when Yazid son of Mu'awiya declared his rulership.

Yazid son of Abu Sufyan: Brother of Mu'awiya, governor of Syria for a few years until he died.

Yazid son of Mu'awiya: Son of Mu'awiya, the infamous despicable ruler, cause of Karbala tragedy.

Zainab: Sister of Al-Husayn, heroin of Karbala, losing her children for the cause.

Zubair: Sahaabi, leader during Jamal Confrontation, refused to fight during that battle.

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